Bagram Airfield Combat Support Hospital Open For Holidays

By: Sarah McCleary

Aerial view of the Bagram AirField Hospital, Afghanistan.

A $14.4 million project to build a level three combat support hospital at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan is complete, opening its doors on Nov. 2, 2006 for Soldiers and local citizens. To accomplish this, the contractor used two types of construction, both traditional concrete masonry and prefabricated modular units. Awarded to Turkish contractor, Zafer in 2004, the hospital's design and construction was complete in two years. The new hospital boasts 83,000 square feet, $9.5 million in new medical equipment, and most notably, three modular hospital wings capable of forward deployment with troops if needed.

"The heart of the hospital is in the modular portion," said Jere Lee McClendon, project engineer and quality assurance representative. "The emergency room, operating room, intensive care unit, and intensive care ward are all deployable." Forming these wings are 72 combined modular units, supported by ten portable mechanical and electrical units. These wings have a total of 45 patient beds, 21 in the intensive care unit and 24 in the intensive care ward. The surgical team works in three operating rooms, while the emergency and trauma team have four trauma beds, two isolation rooms, and two treatment beds.

The modular units can be disassembled, relocated, and reassembled in order to provide top-of-the-line care in any location. These units are also independently supported both electrically and mechanically by their own Milvans which house water heaters, air handling units, electrical panels, and air conditioning units. Inside the building however, you would never know you were in the modular area versus the concrete portion of the hospital. "The same contractor built both sections of the hospital and the links between the two types of construction were part of the design; it all looks like one big unit," said McClendon.

The concrete portions of the Bagram Combat Support Hospital host the hospital command center and many human health services. Five buildings make up the concrete portion of the hospital. They house a variety of medical and therapeutic services including a veterinary hospital, ambulance dispatch and shelter, sick call, respiratory therapy, patient administration, blood bank, laboratory, pharmacy, radiology department, dental clinic, outpatient clinic, combat stress area, and preventative medicine.

Another value of the hospital is the jobs it will bring to the surrounding community. Already, local Apghans are working in the hospital in the housekeeping and maintenance departments. However, local doctors and medical school students will also have the opportunity to work alongside American doctors at the facility.

A military medical equipment transition team is working to relocate existing medical equipment to the facility while two other contractors are

Equipment in the ER.

working to install the $9.5 million in new medical equipment at the hospital. General Electric is installing the radiology equipment and CT Scan units. Herman Miller is installing all of the medical furniture and cabinetry.

"In the United States, this project would have been tough enough," said McClendon. "But being in a combat zone increased the construction complications significantly." All materials are shipped in from outside Afghanistan, many from the United States. Construction must be timed perfectly in order for materials to make it in time and stay on budget. The materials must make their way through each country's border security followed by base security, taking weeks or months to obtain one supply item. "It's a challenge I have never had on any other project," said McClendon.

The language barrier was also an issue, even with translators on site. "I had trouble with their accent, though they had trouble with my southern drawl too," admitted McClendon.

Zafar's construction methods also caught McClendon off-guard. In Afghanistan manual labor is used as opposed to mechanical equipment because of the cost. Local nationals are paid around $5 dollars a day, a good wage in the region. "You would see six or eight people digging a trench where at home you would only see one backhoe doing the same job," explained McClendon.

Photos for this article provided by Jere Lee McClendon, deployed out of Savannah District's Fort Bragg office.

A view of the hospital's emergency entrance.